EXHIBIT 2
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HB 348

House Bill 348
January 23, 2007
Presented by Chris Smith
House Business and Labor Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Chris Smith, Chief of Staff of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

FWP supports HB 348, which increases the price of non-resident temporary use permits for snowmobiles from $15 to $25 and directs the additional revenue to the statewide trails program, including grooming costs for areas impacted by nonresidents, and enforcement of snowmobile laws.

The number of non-resident snowmobiles registered for use in Montana increased from about 6600 in 2003 to over 10,000 in 2006. The upward trend will likely continue as more non-residents come to Montana to enjoy our recreational opportunities and become aware of the law. Commensurate with this increase in use, we can expect to see increased need for grooming trails, finding new places for snowmobilers to ride and increased education and enforcement to assure public safety. Current funding supports an average of only 21 hours per year for each FWP Warden in snowmobiling areas. Additional funding provided by HB 348 would increase trail maintenance and the amount of time Wardens can spend in the field, increasing both public safety and assuring funds needed for trail maintenance are collected.

From 2005 to 2006, snowmobile checks increased by over 2,000, along with an increase of 27 tickets and 150 verbal warnings. The large increase in verbal warnings can be attributed to situations where wardens contact large groups of non-compliant non-residents and only one ticket is written to an individual and the rest of the group receive warnings.

FWP is aware there may be amendments to HB 348 to change the allocations and increase funding for search and rescue or license vendors. We recognize the role these entities play in the snowmobile program and are open to discussions about the appropriate allocation to these entities, as well as to trail maintenance and enforcement.